

June 12, 1967

Dr. Tracy Sonneborn
Department of Zoology
Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana 47405

Dear Tracy:

I was quite delighted to receive your letter of June 4. I have known of your interest in the problem of accumulation of genetic damage with paternal age, and I would be very pleased if I could make any contribution towards making the maximum use of the investment you have already made in the situation.

I believe you are right in thinking we are very well equipped from a technical standpoint to deal with files of this kind. It is also true that I have perhaps become too skeptical of the utility of information collected by mass surveys of this kind from our experiences with census data. The possibilities of very serious biases in ascertainment are very difficult to cope with.

Nevertheless, I would be extremely enthusiastic about making some effort to get the best out of the situation, and my a priori outlook may be altogether too gloomy, especially if you have been able to have some direct relationship with the Health Department in the way in which it collects its records.

In any event, I would be very pleased to get some more detailed information from you about the nature of the file and the characteristics that are included in each record.

I understand very well the "conditions" that you mentioned as attached to your offer and far from balking at any of them, I would be the first to insist upon them. Besides the study on accumulated genetic damage--which is one that my colleague, Dr. Howard Cann of the Pediatrics Department, would certainly share deep interest in--there are also a number of other questions that I might like to ask, but before formulating them I should see what is in the records.

We do have an excellent time-sharing computer system which makes it possible for us to conduct our interrogations on essentially a real time basis from a typewriter in my office. This unquestionably gives an investigator much deeper access to the file, since he is able to get preliminary answers at least to many of his questions while he is still interested in them, and the iterative process characteristic of other kinds of research is now available in these studies in a much more convenient way.

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I would like to be able to add a condition, but of course have no way of insisting upon it, namely, that if we do take advantage of your offer, that it also be coupled with some hope of seeing you here in person some time to see how the system works and to talk over many other issues.

I have just come back from a trip to Europe which was accented by my very near success in managing to be in Israel just during the invasion, but while I was denied that opportunity by a near-misconnection of flights, at least my baggage had the opportunity of sitting in the Tel Aviv airport during those rather exciting times.

On all of the fronts all goes well, and calmly. All the best to you.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics